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ABSTRACT

A behavior modification program was developed and implemented to decrease the tardy behavior of 20 middle school students (ages 13 to 15) in a self-contained dropout prevention class. Student interviews revealed that the students were unable to manage their time, were not motivated to attend class, and did not find class rewarding. The intervention program included the following components: (1) daily time card sign-in; (2) points for prompt attendance, exchangeable for rewards; and (3) a time-management workshop to teach new strategies to save and manage time. Success was measured by comparing attendance data across 7 weeks of program implementation. Knowledge of time-management strategies was determined by administration of a post-implementation survey. Students also designed their own time-management plans. The program's success was demonstrated by: a change from an average of 15 tardies per week to zero tardies for the last 3 weeks of the program; all students were able to identify time-management strategies 4 weeks following the workshop; and all 20 students received rewards for timely attendance during weeks 5-7. The time management questionnaire is appended. (Contains 12 references.) (DB)

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ED 387 985

A Behavior Modification Program to Reduce Tardiness in Middle School Dropout Prevention Students

by
Blanche Johnson
Cluster 66

A Practicum I Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University
1995

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Acknowledgements

To my husband and two sons for their eternal support of a working, student mom. Their patience and commitment will never be forgotten. And, above all, to a loving God who graciously shares his ideas with his children.

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Abstract

A Behavior Modification Program to Reduce Tardiness in Middle School Dropout Prevention Students. Johnson, Blanche, 1995: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Tardiness/Truancy/Absenteeism/ Attendance/Non-Attendance/Student Motivation

A behavior modification program was developed and implemented to decrease tardy behavior in middle school dropout prevention students. A class of 20 students were consistently tardy. Student interviews revealed that students were unable to manage their time. They were not motivated to attend class and did not find class rewarding.

A program was designed and implemented to include: (a) daily time card sign-in, (b) points for prompt attendance exchanged for rewards, and (c) a time-management workshop to teach new strategies to save and manage time. Success was measured by comparing baseline attendance data across 7 weeks of program implementation. Knowledge of time-management strategies was determined by administration of a post-implementation survey. Students also designed their own time-management plans. The behavior modification program proved to be very successful. Giving regular rewards, making students accountable for behavior, as well as assigning practical activities motivated students toward desirable behavior.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

The practicum site was located in a public middle school in the southeast. Thirteen hundred students attended school annually. The faculty consisted of 105 teachers. The school was average size for the district in which it was located. The majority of the students came from middle class and low income families. Many of the parents of the students had attended this middle school, since it was the only middle school in town. Most students walked to school, others were brought by parents. A small number of students, about 200, were bussed.

Writer's Work Setting

The school had a dropout prevention program which consisted of three self-contained classes. The aim of the program was to provide students a smaller class environment that moved at a slower rate. This enabled students to accomplish educational goals.

Twenty students in the dropout prevention program were the focus of the field practicum. The class consisted of 17 males and 3 females. The ages ranged from 13 to 15 years old, with 14 being the average age. The class was racially diverse and consisted of 10 black, 7 Spanish, and 3 white

students. All students in the program had met specific criteria to be placed in the dropout prevention class.

Writer's Role

The writer was a school social worker, whose major responsibility was to be a consultant to faculty and staff. Fulfilling this role involved problem assessment and intervention. The main objective was to help referred students gain the most out of their school experience. This involved helping students understand how various problems resulting from home, school, or the community may have been impacting on their school performance. This also included providing counseling and referring students to appropriate agencies to meet their needs.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this practicum was student tardiness. Dropout prevention students were not reaching their maximum potential in class attendance.

Problem Description

The students in the dropout prevention class were tardy regularly. The attendance office overflowed daily with students arriving late to school. Some teachers delayed lessons until students arrived so that instruction would not be interrupted. The dropout prevention program had no effective mechanism in place to discourage tardiness. Therefore, students were not motivated to attend promptly.

Problem Documentation

Student interviews revealed that tardiness was a multifaceted problem. When reviewed, attendance records documented that 20 out of 20 students in the dropout prevention class were tardy daily. Student interviews further showed that 20 of the 20 students believed their tardiness had become a routine, and 15 out of the 20 stated that they were not motivated to attend class in a timely manner.

Causative Analysis

There were a number of causes leading to this problem. First, students wasted time before class. Students used time before and between classes to socialize with friends. Students also consumed time at the water fountain and using the restroom. Secondly, poor planning caused students to be late to class. Students failed to prepare clothes and books the night before school. Students often waited until the last minute to get books from their locker or did not get enough books for subsequent classes. Finally, rigid class structure did not motivate attendance, students were denied free time, and incentives were absent from the program.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A survey of the literature suggested that others have been concerned with the problem. Students with low motivation in middle and high school often exhibited irregular school attendance. These students sometimes had learning disabilities or other problems that caused them not to attend school. This population was often ascribed derogatory labels that only fostered social isolation (Lazerson, Foster, Brown & Hummel, 1988). Students experiencing repeated school failure developed negative attitudes toward school. As a result, school became the last place a troubled student wanted to be.

Student records indicated that tardiness and nonattendance were growing problems. Chronic tardiness was

identified by using documents, such as teacher referrals and past and present attendance records. Ten days of regular tardies were used as a cut-off point to establish a baseline (Hegner, 1987). Purvis and Leonard (1985) measured tardiness by counting the number of times students came to class late without an acceptable excuse. Tardiness was identified with the lack of student discipline in the nation's schools.

Baker and Sansone (1990) reported that school personnel were pursuing ways to encourage high school completion. Dropouts were usually the students with the most attendance problems. Tardiness was identified as a dimension of the attendance problem. Data was collected from administrative referrals, personnel interviews, and student records regarding class attendance and behavior.

Jackard (1983) reported that students had a problem with absenteeism, tardiness, motivation, and discipline. These problems were documented by referrals to the alternative educational program via the suspension and expulsion committee. Most times students were not meeting the expectations of their regular school programs in the areas of discipline, attendance, and behavior. Prolonged absenteeism and chronic tardiness was associated with parental neglect by Roscoe, Peterson, and Shaner (1983). It was suggested that absenteeism excludes the student from the

school experience of others, thus forcing the student deeper into social isolation.

Mann (1986) suggested that schools that allowed students to graduate with excessive tardies and absences only contributed to the problem. Students were not motivated to improve their attendance, which had implication for their future employment. Potential employers tend to focus their attention more on discipline, promptness, and work ethic than academic skills.

Stumphauzer (1985) discussed poor school attendance and its relationship to juvenile delinquency. Students with attendance problems and learning disabilities often avoided school in order to avoid failure or the association. Attendance or tardiness problems were usually symptomatic of other issues students were dealing with in or outside of school. The problems ranged from substance abuse to child abuse. Parents sometimes had ineffective parenting skills or none at all. According to Stover (1991), sometimes single parents were unable to monitor the attendance of their children because of long hours that did not coincide with school. Their children, who may have been experiencing school problems, may have taken advantage of the opportunity to stay at home. There may have been a breakdown of parent child communication. Parents who did not communicate effectively with their children may have assumed that their children were doing fine in school. Often they were

astonished when school administrators informed them of their child's lack of attendance and emotional problems.

Tardiness had been identified as a precursor to dropping out of school (Ekstrom, Goetz, Pollack & Rock, 1986). Therefore, school tardiness had serious implications for students at all levels of education.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

The writer's overall goal was to facilitate students to attend classes promptly on a daily basis. Students would be able to benefit from the entire class period, and they would be motivated to attend class regularly.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this practicum:

1. Daily attendance reports will increase. Fifteen out of 20 students will attend class promptly.

2. Students will be able to manage their time. Twenty out of 20 students will be able to identify strategies to increase punctuality.

3. Students will be motivated to attend class. Twenty of 20 students will find class rewarding and will attend promptly.

Measurement of Outcomes

Each student's current tardy record was summed and averaged to establish a baseline for the class. These records gave an accurate account of the tardiness problem. Each student was issued a time-card and was required to sign in their time of arrival. The time card was initialed by

the teacher and kept on the classroom wall by the door. This provided a visual inspection of progress. Next, data points were plotted on a graph to indicate the number of tardies across 7 weeks.

A post-implementation questionnaire was administered to see if 20 students would be able to identify five time-management strategies. The questionnaire consisted of five open-ended questions. This instrument was utilized because it allowed students to express knowledge of time-management strategies in their own words. Thirty minutes was allotted for administration of the instrument.

A behavior modification point system was implemented which allowed students to earn 20 points per day for prompt attendance. Five possible points were earned for morning arrival and three for class changes. Students were allowed to earn 100 points maximum per week. A minimum of 20 points were needed for a reward. Points were used to purchase video game time, items in the school store, and extended lunch time. Progress was documented by summing and averaging the number of points earned weekly for each student and plotting the data on a graph. Rewards were utilized for student attendance behavior because they could be designed for a specific group of students, they were highly motivating, and could be reinforced regularly.

These instruments were utilized because they were simple to implement and efficient. They did not require

additional resources, therefore, maintaining cost effectiveness.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Dropout prevention students were not reaching their maximum potential in class attendance. The students in the dropout prevention class were tardy regularly. The dropout prevention program had no effective mechanism in place to discourage tardiness. Therefore, students were not motivated to attend promptly.

A number of solutions were gleaned from the literature. Truant and tardy junior high students showed marked decrease in poor attendance when used as tutors for learning disabled students (Lazerson et al., 1988). Placing students in a leadership role reinforced appropriate behavior and raised the self-esteem of the students involved. The students were able to demonstrate responsibility. The truant and tardy behaviors decreased significantly.

A behavior modification program was effective in changing the tardy behavior of middle and high school students. Students earned points daily based on class participation, class work, and good behavior. The points were used in exchange for free time in the campus game room. Students also received daily group counseling to help with problem identification and solutions.

Truancy was effectively decreased when a needs assessment was conducted with students with severe attendance problems. The students were made aware that their attendance would be monitored. They were placed in a program which included weekly counseling, personal growth groups, and academic counseling (Hegner, 1987).

An urban school district used effective interventions at various levels to improve attendance behavior (Baker & Sansone, 1990). A committee was formed to answer the needs of students who were at high risk for dropping out of school. Emphasis was placed on school organization and its impact on students. Interventions at the individual level included visits to the students' homes, student and counselor contracts, monitoring, teacher consultation, and a sign-in system, to name a few. Interventions at the school level involved establishment of a reading lab, cooperative credit, change of classes to reduce failure, a special homeroom program, and a parenting program with the school psychologist. At the district level, students were able to transfer among high schools for special placement in a variety of programs.

Effective approaches to attendance problems and dropping out were discussed by Quinn (1991). Recommendations included peer-tutoring, computer-assisted instruction, and limiting school registration to 500 students for at-risk youth. Hamilton (1986) suggested that students who are high

risk for dropping out should not be isolated from regular students and in special programs. Isolation contributed to low self-esteem and school failure. Vocational training was mentioned as an intervention which prepared students for their role in the world. Vocational and work-study programs were found to be highly effective in reducing attendance problems.

A number of ideas were generated in the area of solving tardiness and attendance problems. First, behavior modification programs were used effectively (Jackard, 1983). The programs often included a variety of rewards which can be designed for each specific environment. Another strategy to deter attendance problems was to provide education about the problem. The education was provided in the form of a workshop. Baker and Sansone (1990) used stress management workshops to help students cope with problems so they could remain focused on school. Changing the class of a failing student who has attendance problems is a variable solution. Removing the student from the environment where the student was mostly associated with failure helped the students avoid stigma (Lazerson et al., 1988). Individualized attention was used to motivate students who were constantly tardy (Mann, 1986). Teachers were able to assist students by giving them the opportunity to make up missed assignments without penalty.

The writer has critiqued some of the solutions involved with decreasing tardiness. First, Lazerson et al. (1988) was concerned with the problem of truancy and tardiness. The focus was toward improving the student's motivation toward school. A tutoring program was the solution, which placed the student in a position of responsibility. The intervention was very practical. Students learned social skills in the process. It raised self-esteem and reinforced positive self-regard. The solution was economical. The students were the tutors, therefore, no outside staff or additional resources were required. The tutoring sessions did not exceed 20 minutes, thus making the program time efficient.

Jackard's (1983) solutions were developed to answer the problems of attendance, poor motivation, and discipline problems. A behavior modification program included points which could be earned in exchange for time spent in a very well equipped game room. The strategy was effective; however, changes would have to be made in the event a game room was unavailable. To provide a game room would not be cost effective. Also, additional staff would be required to monitor the game room.

Hegner's (1987) solution strategies which consisted of assessment and referral to personal growth groups for problem-solving and support were practical but not efficient for the writer's environment. Coordination is necessary for

group times to coincide with individual daily schedules. Students cannot afford to miss academics. Also, finding group facilitators can be just as inconvenient. The group fosters skill building by allowing students to take responsibility for solving their own problems, which is very effective.

Multiple interventions at multiple levels were the focus of the solution strategies of the program evaluated by Baker and Sansone (1990). Interventions which required individual accommodation for students, such as class changes, contracts, and home visits were easy to implement and were cost effective. However, those solutions where school structure had to be changed were more difficult because special planning was required as well as additional resources. These solutions included a special homeroom program, parenting program, establishment of a reading lab, and more at the district level. The previous solutions would not be practical or convenient for the writer's environment because of limited time and resources.

Quinn (1991) discussed organizing peer tutoring and computer-assisted instruction classes. Limiting school enrollment to 500 students was also recommended. Peer tutoring programs were effective and were not costly. They were, as mentioned earlier, very practical because of the potential to learn problem-solving skills. Computer-assisted instruction would be costly if there was no

hardware already in place to be utilized, or if additional software was needed. Limiting school enrollment would be a district decision, therefore, it was not efficient for the writer's environment.

Hamilton (1986) suggested vocational training as a solution strategy. First, the training would teach the students practical skills which could be used for future work. Also, the training would motivate students, but it would require coordination of guidance counselors and vocational schools. Also, the availability of vacancies in the program would be a contingency which made the process time consuming and therefore inappropriate for the writer's environment.

Description of Selected Solution

The writer used a combination of innovative interventions to decrease tardiness. Based on the analysis and evaluation of articles and ideas, the writer created a unique plan relative to the environment. The solutions to decrease tardiness consisted of a behavior modification program which included rewards for achieved behavior and personal accountability for attendance. The program included a workshop on time management strategies to help students identify their problem areas. These solutions were appropriate because they were simple to implement and were not time consuming. Also, the interventions did not require additional resources, therefore, maintaining cost

effectiveness. The appropriateness of the solution strategy was reflected in projected outcomes. Since students wasted time socializing and attending to personal matters before classes, students were held accountable for their tardiness. A time card accountability system with negative consequences discouraged tardiness.

Attendance records documented prompt attendance. As mentioned earlier, poor planning and organization caused students to require additional time before and during school. The time management workshop enabled students to learn strategies that deterred tardiness. Students were able to identify these strategies and increased their punctuality. Finally, student interviews showed that the rigid class structure prevented students from having free time. Students also found classes mundane and unrewarding. Therefore, a banking system which allowed students an opportunity to earn points for prompt attendance was implemented. Points were used in exchange for a variety of rewards. Students found class rewarding. These elements motivated prompt attendance.

Report of Action Taken

The writer began implementation by first conferencing with the principal and administrators regarding the numerous tardy referrals in the dropout prevention (DOP) class. The writer discussed the tardiness behavior modification program and received approval for implementation.

The writer met with the DOP teacher for orientation to the behavior modification program. The writer also discussed ways in which the teacher could motivate students to attend class, such as speaking to the students in a positive manner, emphasizing their accomplishments, and having high expectations. The writer also explained the time-management workshop, which involved teaching students strategies that conserved time and enabled them to get to class promptly. The time card accountability system and reward banking system involved the teacher monitoring the time cards and giving points for attendance which accrued for rewards. The writer made a change to the behavior program which involved the elimination of deducting points and maintaining a negative balance. The writer and the teacher felt that DOP students would benefit most from a program emphasizing positive reinforcement. The teacher was supplied with 7 weeks of weekly time cards for each student. The teacher and the writer established rewards, such as free time to play games, read books, chat with friends, or students could use points to purchase snacks from the school store.

The teacher was given a week to become familiarized with the program. Next, the writer met with the dropout prevention class for program orientation. The discussion included a detailed account of the students' tardiness records. The writer also explained the time-management

workshop and informed students that they would be expected to identify time-management strategies on a questionnaire at some point during the program. An explanation of the time card accountability and reward banking system was given. Students were notified that their time of arrival would be documented daily on their personal time card and points would be given for prompt attendance. A description of the rewards were also discussed. The behavior modification program was well received. The students displayed great enthusiasm and were anxious to begin the program.

The following week the writer implemented the time-management workshop. The DOP teacher was out on sick leave for 3 days; therefore, the writer had to meet periodically to orient the substitute teacher to the program. The writer taught time-management strategies which would increase students getting to school on time, such as preparing clothes the night before, going to bed early, and using an alarm clock to get up early. The writer also discussed how to manage time between classes. Students were instructed to retrieve enough books from the lockers for two classes in order to eliminate several visits.

The class was given alternatives to using time between classes to socialize. Students were directed to talk to friends before school and during lunch. Also, students could exchange phone numbers and speak with each other at home. Next, the students were given organizational

strategies that save time, such as writing notes and making "to do" lists. The writer informed students that lists helped to organize their thinking and taught them how to decide which activities would take more or less time. The last segment of the workshop required students to develop their own time-management plan. They were asked to write a one-day plan using the strategies learned from the presentation.

The following week the writer met with the DOP class to review the workshop. Students were asked to voluntarily share their time-management plans. Students eagerly shared their plans and lists for that day.

The writer instructed the DOP teacher to implement the time cards and reward system during the next week of the practicum. Some students did not take the program seriously. Some students arrived as much as 15 minutes late, others completely forgot about the program. There was also some dispute between the teacher and students regarding the correct time of arrival.

The following week the writer reviewed time cards and reward points to document progress. Those students with points were able to spend them on various rewards. Other students who did not have enough points to make purchases voiced their disappointment and made plans to arrive on time in the future.

The writer met with the teacher and DOP class the following week to find out if students were using time-management strategies and to receive feedback on the program. Students were also able to use points to purchase rewards at this time.

During the next week of the program, the writer administered a time-management questionnaire, which served as a post-implementation instrument. Students were not given previous knowledge of the assignment. The writer instructed the class to answer five questions to the best of their ability. They were informed that they had 30 minutes to complete the assignment.

The next week the writer documented the progress of the time cards and reward bank. The results of the questionnaire were discussed with students. Students were able to give and receive feedback on the process. All of the students responded favorably to having the writer come in weekly and discuss their progress. The teacher stated that students found the weekly visits and time spent with the writer more reinforcing than free time and purchases from the school store. Students looked forward to the writer's verbal praise for prompt attendance and the activities presented. Students were notified that they had one more week left of the behavior modification program.

The progress of the time cards and reward system was documented during the last week of the program. The writer

reviewed the progress from beginning to end with the teacher and the students. The writer also presented graphs and charts documenting progress over 7 weeks. Since the students were highly motivated by the program, the teacher proposed to introduce the program at the beginning of the new school year.

The writer met with the principal and administrators to discuss progress of the behavior modification program. The writer presented graphs and charts documenting attendance progress over 7 weeks and shared the results of the time-management questionnaire. Administration was pleased with the increase in prompt attendance and the program's motivational capability.

Chapter V: Results

Results

The students in the DOP class were tardy regularly. Students arrived late to school and classes daily. Teachers delayed lessons so that instruction would not be interrupted. The DOP program had no effective mechanism in place to discourage tardiness. Therefore, students were not motivated to attend promptly.

The writer's goal was to facilitate students to attend classes promptly on a daily basis. Students would then be able to benefit from the entire class period and would be motivated to attend class regularly.

The solution strategy the writer used was implementation of a behavior modification program. The program consisted of accountability, rewards for achieved behavior, and a time-management workshop to help students identify strategies which would increase promptness.

Objective 1 stated, daily attendance reports will increase. Fifteen out of 20 students will attend class promptly. This outcome was met. The baseline data showed that prior to intervention the DOP class was averaging 15 tardies per week (see Figure 1). Post-implementation data indicated that tardies declined weekly, resulting in zero tardies for the last 3 weeks of the program. Daily

attendance reports increased and 20 out of 20 students attended promptly.

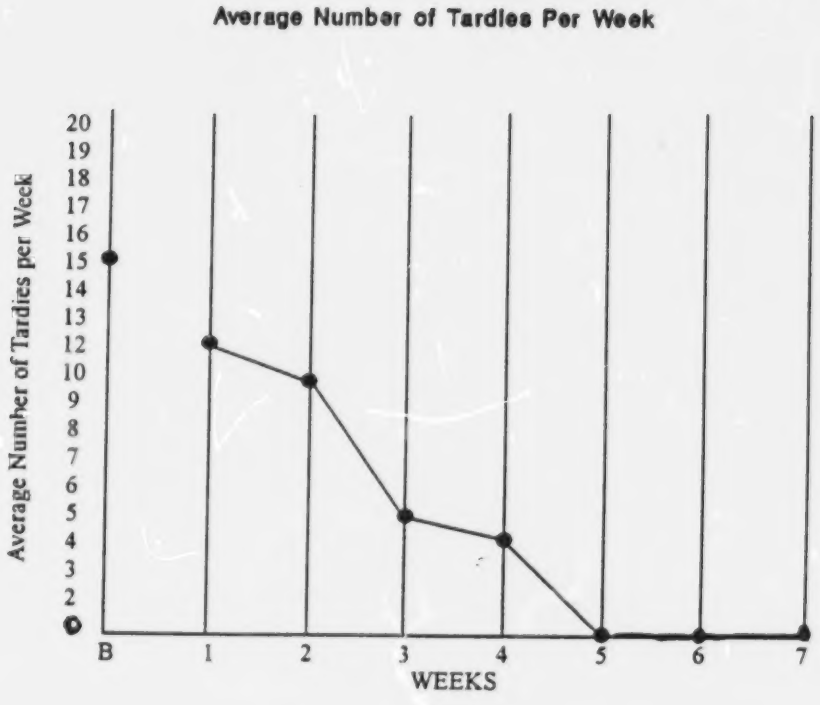

Figure 1

Objective 2 stated, students will be able to manage their time. Twenty out of 20 students will be able to identify strategies to increase punctuality. This outcome was met. A time-management workshop was given to help students identify time-management strategies which would increase promptness. Four weeks following the workshop, 20 out of 20 students were able to identify time-management strategies (see Table 1) on the post-implementation questionnaire.

Table 1

Identification of Time-Management Strategies by Students

Strategies	No. of Students[a]
1. Identify one strategy which would increase your chances of getting to school on time.	20
2. Identify one strategy which would eliminate having to get items from the locker between every class.	20
3. Identify one strategy which would decrease socializing between classes.	20
4. Identify one strategy which would eliminate having to do last minute things between classes.	20
5. Identify one strategy which would increase overall time management.	20

[a] Number of students out of 20 who correctly identified strategies

Objective 3 stated, students will be motivated to attend class. Twenty of 20 students will find class rewarding and will attend promptly. This outcome was met. Prior to the behavior modification program, students did not receive rewards for prompt attendance. During the first week of the program, only two students received rewards for being punctual (see Figure 2). The stated outcome was met during Weeks 5-7. Twenty students received rewards for timely attendance, therefore, students were motivated to attend and found it rewarding.

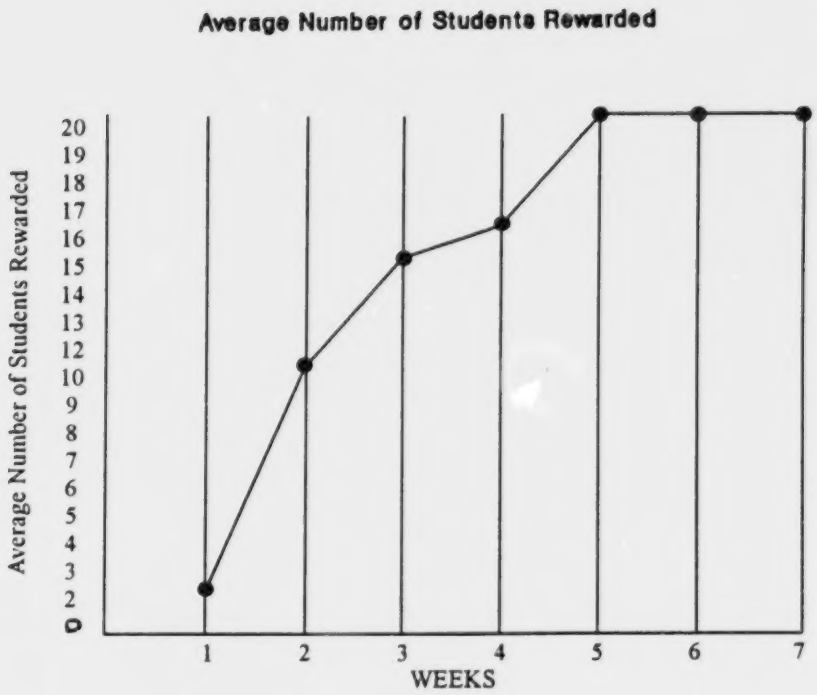

Figure 2

Discussion

The projected outcomes were met because students found class rewarding. Behavior modification programs are very effective since rewards can be tailored for a specific population (Jackard, 1983). Receiving weekly rewards allowed the students to be reinforced regularly.

Secondly, having students sign in made them accountable for their behavior. Accountability has been used effectively to improve attendance behavior (Baker & Sansone, 1990). Signing in also allowed students to become participants instead of passively waiting for the class roll to be called. Another aspect of accountability is

responsibility. The students were aware that they were responsible for getting to class on time. Lazerson et al. (1988) found that truant and tardy students' poor attendance decreased when they were placed in a leadership role and given responsibility.

The workshop aspect of the program was very effective because, as mentioned before, students were allowed to be participants. Designing their own time-management plans gave students an opportunity to relate the strategies and to practice them.

Results indicated that behavior modification programs can be very effective. Regular rewards, making students accountable for behavior, education, and practical activities motivate students toward desirable behavior.

Recommendations

Schools should require students to be more responsible for their attendance behavior. Implementing a sign-in roll or time-clock where students punch in may help students find relevance between school and preparation for the work-a-day world. Weekly rewards should be included in programs and educational plans. Many students cannot maintain desirable behavior for several weeks before receiving a reward.

Dissemination

Results will be shared with administration, faculty, and colleagues. The report will be presented to the

department which will enable colleagues the opportunity to duplicate the program in their school setting.

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APPENDIX

TIME MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX

TIME MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Identify one strategy which would increase your chances of getting to school on time.

2. Identify one strategy which would eliminate having to get items from the locker between every class.

3. Identify one strategy which would decrease socializing between classes.

4. Identify one strategy which would eliminate having to do last minute things between classes.

5. Identify one strategy which would increase overall time management.